The Law of Purdah for Women

Question: Women come in front of strange (non-Mahram) men and sit and speak with them freely. They often even sit with such men in privacy without their husbands bothering to stop them. In fact, their husbands even approve of it. What is the ruling concerning such men? Does the Shari'ah require women to observe *Purdah*? Please furnish details.

Answer: The law of *Hijaab* (*purdah*) is really a demand of self-respect and possessiveness and had it not been part of the Shari'ah, the Shari'ah would have been deficient. It is only those people who are deprived of a Nabi υ who will be deprived of *purdah*.

Rasulullaah ρ's pure wives were the mothers of the Ummah, as stated in the Qur'aan, yet Allaah instructed them saying, ***"Remain in your homes and (when it is absolutely necessary to leave your homes, leave properly clothed and) do not make a display of yourselves as was the practice of (women during) the former period of ignorance"***[1]

Although the Sahabah ψ were the most virtuous and purest people of this Ummah, Allaah instructed them saying, in another verse of the Qur'aan states: ***"When you ask them (Rasulullaah ρ's wives) for anything, then ask them from behind a curtain (without seeing them). This is purer for your hearts and for their hearts (for it safeguards you from evil thoughts and desires)."***[2]

Hadhrat Ummu Salamah رضي الله عنها and Hadhrat Maymoona رضي الله عنها were once with Rasulullaah ρ when the blind Sahabi Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Ummu Maktoom τ came there. Rasulullaah ρ instructed the two of them to observe *purdah* from him. "O Rasulullaah ρ!" Hadhrat Ummu Salamah رضي الله عنها said, "But he is blind and cannot see us." Rasulullaah ρ's reply was, "Are you two also blind that you cannot see him?"[3]

Hadhrat Saalim τ was a slave and a man with extremely high levels of Taqwa and chastity. He used to commonly see Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها and speak to her. However, the day he told her that he had been set free, she congratulated him and immediately observed *purdah* from him. After that day, he never saw her again.[4]

Hadhrat Anas τ was the special servant of Rasulullaah ρ. The day he informed Rasulullaah ρ that he had come of age, Rasulullaah ρ instructed him never to go to see his wives again (without *purdah*). Although there can be no child today as chaste as Hadhrat Anas τ and no women as chaste as the wives of Rasulullaah ρ, yet Rasulullaah ρ had them observe *purdah* from each other.

It is a blatant objection against the Shari'ah to say as people do today that there is no need for the conventional *purdah* because all that is needed is a clean heart. Can the hearts of today's people be cleaner than those of Rasulullaah ρ, the Sahabah ψ and the pure wives of Rasulullaah ρ?

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[1] Surah Ahzaab, verse 33.
[2] Surah Ahzaab, verse 53.
[3] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.269).
[4] Nasa'ee (Vol.1 Pg.14).

Someone once asked the famous saint Sheikh Naseer Aabaadi رحمه الله, "People sit with strange woman and say that it is not their intention to look at her." The Sheikh remarked, "As long as the body of man remains, the commands and prohibitions of the Shari'ah shall also remain and man will always be directed by them."[5]

For non-Mahram men and women to see each other opens the doors of immodesty and licentiousness. By abstaining from looking at non-Mahram people of the opposite sex, people can trample their passion and desires. Allaah addresses Mu'mineen men and women in the Qur'aan saying, "***Tell the Mu'mineen men that they should lower their gazes (not look at non-Mahram women) and guard their chastity (not do or look at anything that may lead to adultery or fornication or homosexuality). This is purer for them (ensures their purity and the purity of society at large). Allaah is Informed of what they do (He knows the inclinations of the heart and the secretive glances that men cast). And tell the Mu'mineen women that they should lower their gazes (not look at non-Mahram men with lust) and preserve their chastity (not do or look at anything that may lead to adultery or fornication or lesbianism).***[6]

From this verse, Allaama Ibn Katheer رحمه الله states that Allaah has enforced the above injunction so that the hearts of Muslim women remain pure, so that they remain chaste and for the self-respect and possessiveness that Muslim men have. It also distinguishes Muslim women from non-Muslim women. Imaam Ghazaali رحمه الله says that the fornication of the eyes is amongst the worst of the minor sins and leads to the major sin of adultery. The person who cannot safeguard his gaze cannot safeguard his Deen.[7]

Hadhrat Dawood υ once advised his son Hadhrat Sulaymaan υ saying, "You had rather pursue a lion or a snake instead of a non-Mahram woman." This he said because the perils that would come from her would be worse than those coming from a lion or a snake.[8]

When someone asked Hadhrat Yahya υ what was the starting point of fornication, he replied, "From looking at non-Mahram people and from greed." Hadhrat Fudhail رحمه الله said, "Shaytaan claims that looking (at non-Mahram people of the opposite sex) is his arrow that never misses its mark."[9]

Rasulullaah ρ said, "The gaze (looking at non-Mahram people of the opposite sex) is a poisonous arrow from the arrows of Shaytaan. When a person forsakes it out of fear for Allaah, Allaah will grant him such Imaan, the sweetness of which he will feel in his heart."[10]

Hadhrat Jareer τ says that he once asked Rasulullaah ρ what to do about the gaze that falls suddenly (and unintentionally). Rasulullaah ρ instructed him to immediately turn his gaze away.[11]

Rasulullaah ρ once told Hadhrat Ali τ never to allow a second glance to follow the first because while the first is allowed (because it was unintentional) the second is not.[12]

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[5] *Bawaadirun Nawaadir* Pg. 706.
[6] Surah Noor, verses 30-31.
[7] *Ihyaa'ul Uloom* (Vol.3 Pg.98).
[8] *Ihyaa'ul Uloom* (Vol.3 Pg.98).
[9] *Ihyaa'ul Uloom* (Vol.3 Pg.98).
[10] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.268).
[11] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.268).

In his book *Ahkaamul Qur'aan*[13], Allaama Abu Bakr رحمه الله explains that if the first glance was also intentional, it will also be Haraam like the second.

Rasulullaah ρ once warned the Sahabah ψ not to sit by the roadside. When they submitted that they were sometimes forced to do so (for conducting business, etc), Rasulullaah ρ told them that they were allowed to do so only if they observed the following (amongst others):

1. To keep their gazes lowered
2. To abstain from causing harm to others
3. To reply to someone greeting with Salaam
4. To enjoin good
5. To forbid evil.[14]

A Hadith states that a woman arrives in the form of a Shaytaan and leaves in the form of a Shaytaan. Yet another Hadith states, "Allaah curses the one who looks (at a non-Mahram woman) and the one who is looked at."[15]

It is for the protection of the Ummah from the mischief of Shaytaan and from spiritual diseases that the Qur'aan instructs women to remain glued to their homes[16]. Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Umar τ reports that Rasulullaah ρ said, "Women have no need to leave their homes except when absolutely necessary."[17]

Shah Wali'ullaah Muhaddith Dehlawi رحمه الله states: "A woman may leave the house only for a necessity for which there is absolutely no alternative. Rasulullaah ρ said, 'A woman is an object of concealment, so when she leaves her home, Shaytaan ogles at her' (he follows her and instigates men to look at her and harbour whimsical passion, thereby posing a danger to her chastity and theirs)."[18]

Majaalisul Abraar states: "The more a woman remains tat home, the safer it is for her Deen. This is deduced from a Hadith in which Rasulullaah ρ once asked his daughter Hadhrat Faatima رضي الله عنها what is best for a woman. She replied, 'That she does not see men and they do not see her.' Rasulullaah ρ liked her reply very much, embraced her and said, 'Families are all one from another.' The Sahabah ψ would also close all the holes in their walls so that their women did not look at other men."[19]

It also stated in *Majaalisul Abraar* that possessiveness is in order and is actually a very necessary and praiseworthy trait because Rasulullaah ρ said, "Allaah is possessive and the Mu'min is also possessive and the possessiveness comes to the fore when a Mu'min does that which Allaah has forbidden." In another Hadith, Rasulullaah ρ states: "I am extremely possessive and it is only the person with an overturned heart who is not possessive." The manner of safeguarding against dishonour is that no man should be allowed near her, that she be prevented from walking in the streets because her going out is a sign of a lack of possessiveness. It is therefore necessary for men to prevent their women from going out unless it be

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[12] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.269).
[13] Vol.4 Pg.388.
[14] *Tafseer Mawaahibur Rahmaan* (Vol.4 Pg.157).
[15] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.270).
[16] Surah Ahzaab, verse 31.
[17] Tabraani.
[18] *Hujjatullaahil Baaligha* (Vol.2 Pg.365).
[19] *Majaalisul Abraar* Pg.98.

for one of the following seven reasons: (1,2) visiting her mother or father, (3,4) seeing her ailing mother or father, (5,6) consoling her bereaved mother or father and (7) visiting her close relatives (brother, sister, aunt, etc) … When a woman leaves her home without the permission of her husband, every angel in the heavens and everything she passes on the way curses her except for men and Jinn. Is is therefore Haraam for her to go out (unnecessarily). Haafidh Ibnul Humaam رحمه الله says, "When women go to a place where they are allowed, they can go only if they are not without *purdah* and without beautifying themselves. They should go dressed in a manner that a man does not even bother to look at them."[20]

Hadhrat Hasan رحمه الله said, "Do you allow your women to bump into Kuffaar men in the marketplaces? May Allaah destroy those who are not protective (over their women)!"[21]

Men who are not possessive over their women are defined as cuckolds in the Hadith, which states that they will not enter Jannah. When the Sahabah ψ asked Rasulullaah ρ what he meant by a cuckold, Rasulullaah ρ said that it was a person who does not care which man visits his womenfolk.[22]

The Shari'ah has restricted the gaze and enforced Hijaab to close the doors to vice because looking at the opposite sex creates impermissible passions to be stirred and is the first rung to the ladder to fornication and adultery. Just as *Zina* (fornication and adultery) has been prohibited, everything leading to it has also bee outlawed in Islaam, as Allaah says, "***Do not even go near to Zina.***[23]"

Looking at a non-Mahram with lust, talking to her, sitting with her, listening to her and touching her are all vehicles towards *Zina* and have all be cautioned against in the Shari'ah. Rasulullaah ρ said, "Looking (at non-Mahram men and women) is the fornication of the eyes, hearing (them speaking) is the fornication of the ears, speaking (to them) is the fornication of the tongue and touching (them) is the fornication of the hands, walking (towards them) is the fornication of the feet, desiring (them) is the fornication of the heart and the private part either culminates the act (of fornication) or shuns it."[24]

This prohibition applies to both men and women. Therefore, just as it is not permissible for a man to look at a non-Mahram woman, it is also not permissible for a woman to look at a non-Mahram man because just as men get tempted, so do women. It is for this reason that just as the Qur'aan instructs men saying, "***Tell the Mu'mineen men that they should lower their gazes …"*** it also addresses women saying, "***And tell the Mu'mineen women that they should lower their gazes (not look at non-Mahram men with lust)…"***[25]

A Hadith states that a woman is like an adulterer when she wears perfume and walks by men.[26] In another Hadith, Rasulullaah ρ states, "I have not left behind me a trial more harmful to men than women."[27] Rasulullaah ρ also warned the Ummah saying,

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[20] *Majaalisul Abraar* Pg. 562.
[21] *Ihyaa* (Vol.2 Pg.48).
[22] Tabraani.
[23] Surah Bani Israa'eel.
[24] Muslim (Vol.2 Pg.336) and Abu Dawood (Vol.1 Pg.299).
[25] Surah Noor, verses 30-31.
[26] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.96).
[27] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.267).

"Beware of women because the first corruption that set into the Bani Israa'eel was because of women."[28]

These times are times of such corruption that Rasulullaah ρ prophesied, "Everything that happened to the Bani Israa'eel shall happen to my Ummah just as one footstep follows another, to the extent that even if one of them committed open incest with his mother, there will be someone from my Ummah who will do the same."[29] These are times of such evil that the Ahadeeth even warned that a woman must not even remain alone with her own father because of the danger of being misled by Shaytaan. A narration states that Hadhrat Hasan τ and Hadhrat Husayn τ would not even look at the wives of Rasulullaah ρ, who were really their grandmothers.[30]

The book *Mi'yaarus Sulook*[31] states: "The evil of a woman not observing *purdah* has many evils because none is safe from Shaytaan. It is for this reason that even though the Qur'aan attests to the chastity of Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها and her father Ameerul Mu'mineen Hadhrat Abu Bakr τ, the two were once sitting alone together when Rasulullaah ρ saw them. Rasulullaah ρ said, 'O Abu Bakr τ! Shaytaan is not far off! Do not sit in seclusion with your own daughter without having a third person with you.'"

Allaah declares: ***"O Nabi ρ! Tell your wives, your daughters and the women of the Mu'mineen that (when they have to leave their homes for some necessity) they should draw down their "jalaabeeb"[32] over themselves." This is best for their recognition (to allow people to distinguish free and honourable women from slaves who are not required to cover themselves in this fashion) so that they are not harmed (not teased or made fun of as was done to slave women in the time of Rasulullaah ρ).[33]*** According to Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Abbaas τ, *Jalaabeeb* is the plural of the word *Jilbaab*, which refers to a garment that covers the body from head to foot.[34] Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Abbaas τ also explained that the *Jilbaab* should be a loose garment that covers the face from above the head and which has only a little opening for one eye.[35]

When Hadhrat Abu Ubaydah Salmaani رحمه الله was asked about this verse, he covered his entire body with a shawl, leaving only his left eye open.[36] Hadhrat Moulana Shabbir Ahmad Uthmaani رحمه الله says, "Narrations of Ahadeeth inform us that after the revelation of the above verse, Muslim women went out covering their bodies and faces, leaving only one eye open for seeing. This proves that when there is fear of evil, free women should cover their faces as well.[37] Imaam Ghazaali رحمه الله also states that women in the time of the Sahabah ψ left home with their faces covered.[38] *Ahkaamul Qur'aan*[39] states that the verse directs that a young woman is commanded to cover her face from strange (non-Mahram) men.

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[28] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.267).
[29] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.30).
[30] *Tafseer Mawaahibur Rahmaan* (Vol.4 Pg.146).
[31] Pg.164.
[32] A loose garment that covers the entire body without revealing the shape of the body and which has only a little opening to allow the woman to see.
[33] Surah Ahzaab, verse 59.
[34] *Ruhul Ma'aani* (Vol.22 Pg.88).
[35] *Ruhul Ma'aani* (Vol.22 Pg.89).
[36] *Tafseer Mawaahibur Rahmaan* (Vol.5 Pg.113), *Ruhul Ma'aani* (Vol.22 Pg.89), *Tafseer Mazhari* (Vol.10 Pg.252).
[37] *Fawaa'ide Uthmaani* Pg.568.
[38] *Ihyaa* (Vol.2 Pg.48).
[39] Vol.3 Pg.458.

All the above prove conclusively that the conventional *purdah* as we know it is proven and it is only those without the fear of Allaah in their hearts who will claim that there is no such injunction.

THE FATWA OF HADHRAT MOULANA MUFTI KIFAAYATULLAAH رحمه الله

Answer: While women are not commanded to cover their faces while performing salaah, the command will apply when non-Mahram men come in front of her because it is the face that really attracts a person and stirs the passions.[40] Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها reports that while performing Hajj, they covered their faces whenever men passed by and then opened them up again as soon as the men had left (because it is forbidden to cover the face while in Ihraam).[41]

When the son of a woman called Ummu Khallaad رضي الله عنها was martyred in a battle, she came (on to the battlefield) to verify what had happened. She was wearing her veil at the time and when someone asked how come she managed to remember wearing the veil despite her grief at the loss of her son, she replied, "I may have lost my son, but I have not lost my modesty."[42]

When someone claimed to be the father of Ummul Mu'mineen Hadhrat Sauda τ's step-brother who was born to her father's slave girl, Rasulullaah ρ rejected the claim. However, Rasulullaah ρ instructed Hadhrat Sauda رضي الله عنها to veil herself from the brother as a precaution (because the boy resembles the other man). She therefore never saw him as long as she lived.[43]

Rasulullaah ρ once cautioned the Sahabah ψ never to go in the presence of non-Mahram women. "But what about the brother-in-law?" a Sahabi τ asked. "The brother-in-law is death!" Rasulullaah ρ said.[44] This means that every woman should stay away from her brother-in-law just as she stays away from death. All the husband's relatives who are not Mahram to his wife fall in the same category as the brother-in-law.

It is unfortunate, that that which Rasulullaah ρ defined as death is regarded as life by most of today's Ummah. They do not regard it as necessary to observe *purdah* from their brothers-in-law and cousins and even sit, talk, joke and travel with such people and think that it is the demands of good character to do so. They sin and still regard this to be an achievement! Even worse is when people of knowledge also join them. It is best for such people to admit their wrong and to make an effort to correct their wrong. They however try to justify their wrong and thereby regard themselves purer than Rasulullaah ρ, his pure wives, daughters and Sahabah ψ (Allaah forbid!).

A Hadith states that when Rasulullaah ρ's eyes fell on a woman one day, he immediately returned to his wife Hadhrat Saudah رضي الله عنها and fulfilled his need with her. He then said, "Whenever any of you is enamoured by a woman he sees, he should immediately go to his wife (and fulfil his need with her) because she also has what that woman had."[45] This was to teach a lesson to the Ummah that they should appease themselves with their own wives whenever they are attracted to another woman.

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[40] *Kifaayatul Mufti* (Vol.5 Pg.388).
[41] Abu Dawood (Vol.1 Pg.261).
[42] Abu Dawood (Vol.1 Pg.344).
[43] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.287).
[44] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.268).
[45] *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.269).

The first (unintentional) glance at a woman is forgiven because it is natural for a person to be affected at the first glance. For some reason in Allaah's wisdom, He has created this natural attraction within humans for the opposite sex and whereas one will be rewarded for using it in a permissible manner, one will be punished for abusing it. If Rasulullaah ρ could be affected, who are we? The injunction is that one has to firm because the probability of vice is so great.

Hakeemul Ummah Hadhrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi رحمه الله writes: "*Purdah* must be observed when it comes to all people for whom the Shari'ah stipulates that *purdah* be observed from, regardless of whether the person is a spiritual mentor or someone close such as a brother-in-law or first cousin."[46] He also says, "It is improper for a young woman to expose her face to a non-Mahram male and she should not also stand in a place where she can be seen. This makes it evident that it is totally impermissible for the bride to show her face to all the men in the family as is the custom."[47]

THE FATWA OF HADHRAT MOULANA MUFTI KIFAAYATULLAAH رحمه الله

Question: When a man instructed his wife to observe *purdah* from his elder brother, his mother became extremely upset and threatened to separate from them because of it. We wish to know whether the mother's rights have been infringed by upsetting her?

Answer: The Hadith defines a woman's brother-in-law as death, meaning that it is incumbent to observe *purdah* from him. The man's instruction therefore complies with the Shari'ah and he has not infringed on his mother's rights.[48]

Question: Four brothers and their parents live in a house and because it is small, it is nor possible to allocate separate quarters for them all. Furthermore, some works, some are not working, others are studying and often they all need to enter at the same time. How is it now possible to observe *purdah*? Will it be permissible to exclude the face, hands and feet? If it is permissible, the problem is that evil thoughts develop when seeing the face and if not permissible, how must domestic activities take place? Wives of different brothers are often seen by the other brothers. (Abridged)

Answer: In such circumstances, the women have to exercise extra caution and, as far as possible, they must not have their faces exposed. If they sometimes appear before another husband out of necessity, there is hope of being forgiven if the heart is clean.[49]

And Allaah knows best what is most correct.

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[46] *Qasdus Sabeel* pg.25.
[47] *Behisti Zewar* Pg.75.
[48] *Kifaayatul Mufti* (Vol.5 Pg.390).
[49] *Kifaayatul Mufti* (Vol.5 Pg.390, 391).